



Pier Paolo Pasolini: An Epical-Religious View of the World

Pier Paolo Pasolini; Leonardo Fioravanti; Omar Zulficar; Nazareno Natale; Giuseppe Francone; Antonietta Fiorito; Dan Perry; Giulio Cesare Castello; Elena Lumbreras; Simon Raoul Hartog; Stefano Silvestrini; Carlo Morandi

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Pier Paolo Pasolini:

An Epical-Religious View of the World

In Italy critics tell you that the only interesting directors are Antonioni and Pasolini. Pasolini has so far been known only secondhand in the United States, though his Mamma Roma had a festival showing. However, Pasolini's films also include Accattone, a rough and effective portrait of a likeable Neapolitan pimp; La Ricotta, an ironic tale which formed part of the three-director film Rogopag; The Gospel According to St. Matthew, a kind of cinema-verite Passion; and La Rabbia, a montage film never released.

His Gospel was a considerable popular success in Italy, and won several awards from the Catholic Church. The phenomenon of an avowedly Marxist director happily collecting church prizes is perhaps peculiarly Italian; but it does not begin to exhaust the strangeness of Pasolini, who is also a widely respected poet and novelist, and has been active in the theater too.

His contributions to the cinema include many scripts and script collaborations—on films by Soldati, Fellini (Notti di Cabiria), Bolognini (Il Bell'Antonio, La Giornata Balorda, and La Notte Brava, which was based on a Pasolini novel), Rossi (Morte di un Amico), Luciano Emmer, and Bertolucci (La Commare Secca). The following conversation took place last year between Pasolini and the students and faculty of the Centro Sperimentale de Cinematografia—the Italian film-school in Rome—and is here (slightly abbreviated) translated by permission from Bianco e Nero.

The translation is by Letizia Ciotti Miller and Michael Graham.

Q.: (LEONARDO FIORAVANTI, Director of the Centro): We will try, in the course of this conversation, to extend our topics of discussion since, from the multiple experiences of Pasolini as scholar, writer, poet, and film-maker we might gain wider insights than those which could be drawn from an artist who has carried on his activity exclusively in the motion picture field. With his films Pasolini has aroused a great

deal of polemic, which at times has focused on subject matter, at times on dramatic structure, at times on the evolution of characters who have seemed to some (and on this point opinions have been truly divergent) utterly devoid of any moral content, to others rich with moral implications. I must also add that Pasolini's films have created much perplexity in certain foreign countries, including the Soviet Union.

I remember that during the conference promoted by the Italy-U.S.S.R. Association in Rome in October, 1963, when conversation turned to the new trends in Italian cinema (and of course Pasolini could not have been left out) the director Chukrai, who stands in the new generation of Soviet cinema as a force of renewal, almost of avant-garde, expressed a rather negative judgment on Pasolini's films and on *Accattone* in particular. He asserted that Pasolini's world did not interest him since he considered it more of an intellectualistic exercise than a reality lived or felt. Obviously, we do not intend to ask Pasolini to speak on this point; the topic, however, might serve to promote discussion in the course of this meeting.

A.: I would like to begin with a premise, so that you know what to expect, since I find myself among people who have just completed their studies whereas I, for the last four or five years, have devoted myself to my work alone: I almost never read a book any more, and very seldom go to the movies. Unfortunately, then, I may answer some questions in a disappointing or incomplete way.

Q.: (OMAR ZULFICAR, 2nd year student of directing): In the last scene of *La Ricotta* we see a table filled with all kinds of fruit. What meaning, more or less allegorical, is to be attributed to that fruit?

A.: It's not that it has an allegorical significance as weighty as you might expect. I merely wanted to represent the opulence and wealth of the ruling class to which both the producer and the director belonged in the capacity of intellectuals, *vis-à-vis* Stracci's hunger. The thing is quite ingenuous. On the other hand, the whole film has an air that, for certain elements and certain situations, goes back to early comedy. Hence the richly loaded table offsets—as a comical figurative effect—the hunger of Stracci crucified. This is what I wanted to represent with that lavishly laid table. . . .

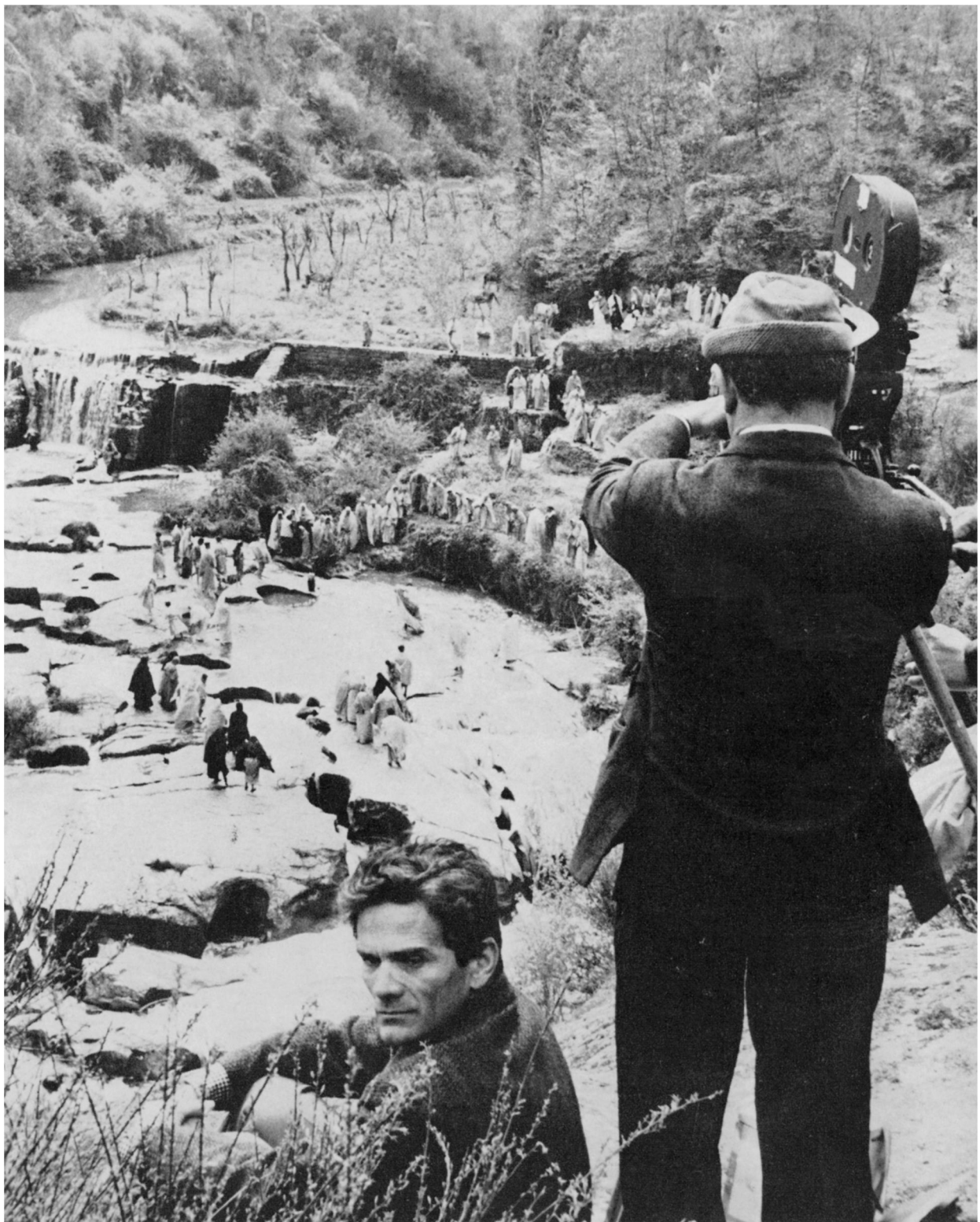
Q.: (NAZARENO NATALE, 1st year acting): What impressed me most in *Accattone* and later in *Mamma Roma* is the contrast between the real, crude, stinking world, and the lyricism always present in the music. I would like to

know what function you attribute to this music and, in particular, if you mean the music to underscore the inner world of your characters.

A.: Yes, of course. My view of the world is always at bottom of an epical-religious nature: therefore even, in fact above all, in misery-ridden characters, characters who live outside of a historical consciousness and specifically, of a bourgeois consciousness, these epical-religious elements play a very important role. Misery is always epical, and the elements at work in the psychology of a derelict, of a poor man, of a lumpenproletarian, are always rather pure because they are devoid of consciousness, and therefore essential. This way of mine of looking at the world of the poor shows up I believe not only in the music, but also in the style itself. Music is, shall we say, the focal element, the sensational element, almost the exterior trappings of the internal stylistic approach, of a given way of shooting, of seeing things, of feeling the character; a way that is realized in the—in a certain sense—solemn fixity of my shots. Especially in *Accattone*, which is the more successful of the two films, there is a fixity—which I playfully call Romanesque—of the characters, in the frontality of the shots, in the simplicity, almost austere, almost solemn, of pans, etc. I think all this is in line with the music which comments upon these images.

Q.: (FOREIGN STUDENT): Your films have impressed me very much because beginning with your earliest pictures you demonstrated a remarkable professional skill that many directors only attain after ten or more years of activity. I would like to ask you to explain to us how you work, that is to say how you go from subject to script and how you make the film, because I feel that your way of working is quite different from the traditional professional methods.

A.: To whoever does not thoroughly know my biography from the inside, as I myself know it, *Accattone* looks like my very first filmed work. It might be surprising that I, right off the bat, made a movie like *Accattone*, but actually, when I was your age and studying in Bologna I loved the cinema very much and I



was already planning to come and study right here at the Centro Sperimentale. Then instead the war came and I had to give it up. My passion for films is one of the most important elements of my cultural formation; so I have been thinking of films all my life; in fact some of my short stories of the 'fifties (which incidentally I will soon republish)—I remember one in particular that was called "Studies on Life in Testaccio" written in 1950, approximately ten years before *Accattone* — had elements quite similar to a shooting script. I spoke in fact of dollies, pans, and so on. And later also in *Ragazzi di Vita*, which I wrote in 1951, many scenes, such as for instance that of the boys and the dogs swimming in the Aniene, are *visual* scenes, figuratively cinematographic. All this to say that I haven't come to films all of a sudden. Not only that, but before *Accattone* I had written four or five scenarios; some were quite serious works. For instance my first scenario, written in collaboration with Bassani, was *La Donna del Fiume*, a film with Sophia Loren; then I wrote three more in collaboration; finally I worked on Rossi's *Morte di un Amico*, which was practically my own film and on *La notte Brava*. Hence when I came to *Accattone* I already had a well-defined approach to films. This to give you the external elements of my history as a director; as for the interior elements, that's a more complicated business. I've come to films without any professional knowledge, so much so that even now, when I hear

my cameraman talk about soft focus I don't know exactly what this is, and in the same way I still don't absorb many other technical elements which, due to my own *forma mentis*, I am unable to grasp. When I began shooting *Accattone* I didn't know the meaning of the word "pan," which I thought meant just a very long shot; later I learned that "pan" is a camera movement. Therefore I arrived at *Accattone* with a great intimate preparation, a great charge of cinematographic passion and a theoretical feel for the film image, but a total lack of technical training. In other words the scenes of the film were so clear in my head that I had no need of technical knowledge to realize them, I had no need to know that a pan is called "pan" in order to make a camera movement which would show the peeling walls of Pigneto.

Q.: (FOREIGN STUDENT): Your films show an authenticity almost like that of *cinéma vérité*, which has touched me deeply. I'd like to ask you whether this atmosphere of truth was established in the scenario or whether it was the result of things seen and captured during the shooting.

A.: This truth is antecedent to any technique. If you read the scenario of *Accattone* you will find all the elements of the film. The scenario already covered everything and I invented or improvised nothing while shooting, outside of small and irrelevant details; that is to say I followed the scenario very faithfully, though it had been outlined in a rather approximate manner, a bit like a sketch. Nevertheless when I drafted the scenario I already had in mind what I was to do and would have done when shooting. Obviously, between scenario and film there is a qualitative jump, and here I find it very difficult to express myself verbally—even writing it has been hard—because I still lack the proper vocabulary to talk about films. The film was in my mind; as I prepared the scenario I envisaged the images that I would later shoot; still, in the end, the film evolved as a new thing, a thing which I really made at the moment, exactly as when one writes something. I can take notes for a poem, but then when I've written a poem I realize that notes and

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poems are different things, with the same jump that exists between a scenario and a film. Thus I cannot answer you clearly; I cannot tell you the scenario already had everything, though in effect it had. Nevertheless the selection of that particular sidewalk rather than another, the selection of that light rather than another, of those characters rather than others, made it so that in the end *Accattone* was utterly different from what I had visualized in the scenario. In other words in the scenario I had seen the plan of the scenes which composed the film and I carried out this plan faithfully, I tried to fill it with a truly live substance, with poetical elements or, if you wish, with poetry.

Q.: (GIUSEPPE FRANCONI, production management): Between *Accattone* and *La Rabbia* there is a jump that in my opinion is only apparent. In *Rabbia* there is a very important moment where you say that when farmers and artisans will be no more, when the cycle of production will be completed then. . . . I feel that in this way you begin to prefigure the world of post-bourgeois anguish, the world of the technological consumer society, and you insert yourself somewhat in all that more authentically European, bourgeois question, in the world of subhuman characters à la Becket, let us say. That is why the jump is only apparent, because there is a very intimate link between the subhumanity, the primordiality of certain characters at the end of their bourgeois experience, as in Becket, and the subhumanity and primordiality of your characters from the lumpenproletariat who haven't yet managed to acquire a conscious life. You have a rather disheartened, pessimistic, religious outlook, but not a Christian one, so that your characters absolutely cannot redeem themselves; there is only a vague sense of hope. . . . Yet when someone points out to you that you are not a realist, that you haven't accomplished the famous mythical passage from neorealism to realism, you justify yourself by saying that to begin with, films don't have the same semantic precision as words and that you conceived *Accattone* in a moment of discouragement, that is to say in the summer of the Tambroni govern-

ment. I don't feel that your defense is fair because then if you accept certain myths, certain mythical prejudices, you should end up by accepting that Soviet view which the director of the school was talking about, according to which these characters would represent an element of alienation for you. All this ought to drive you to accept in the end, even if involuntarily, a Zhdanovist view of culture, of life, of reality, which instead you clearly reject with *La rabbia*.

And then one more question: Is it necessary to utilize art to build socialism or rather build socialism in order to be free and finally be able to produce art? I've asked you this question because it seems to me that you haven't yet made a precise choice between these alternatives.

A.: Your questions are truly a machinegun burst. In order to answer all your questions and talk about all the problems you've touched upon I should have at least an hour at my disposal. Anyway I will start from the last one. The second alternative is of course what I aim for; hence on this point there can be no doubts.

Let's go back a little: as for my defense of *Accattone* in connection with certain polemics, perhaps you haven't been too precise in catching the emphasis of these polemics and the sense of my reply. That is, I was answering those who were saying that *Accattone* was in a certain sense a step back after *Una vita violenta*, not those who told me that I hadn't made the passage from neorealism to realism. You ought to document yourself on this point telling me where I wrote things of this kind. However the two problems are distinct, and I'll try to clarify them. *Accattone* was born in a moment of discouragement, that is to say during the summer of the Tambroni government, so there is a sense in which *Accattone* is a regression with respect to *Una vita violenta*.

Una vita violenta was born in the 'fifties before the Stalinist crisis, when hope, in the prospective shape it took with the Resistance and immediately after the war, was still alive, was a real fact which rendered similarly live and real the prospective of *Una vita violenta*, that

is to say the passage of Tommaso Puzilli through contradictory stages, from fascism and gangsterism to the temptation of the Demochristian, respectable life, and finally to communism. This is not present in *Accattone*; and actually, from a strictly doctrinal communist point of view, *Accattone* turns backward and is in part an involution with respect to *Una vita violenta*. At that time I justified this with historical elements, with my particular biographical experiences that have their own importance in the life of an author. One summer is nothing compared to a century, but it's a lot in the life of an author who exhausts his activity in the span of a few years. As for the rapport between neorealism and realism I don't remember exactly how the question was put; still, it seems just a little schematic. Obviously when one says neorealism and realism, one is sort of caught in a framework; and when caught this way one flounders about rather confusedly. And then I must say that in order to establish whether there is a passage from neorealism to realism in my films, evidently we need first to establish what realism is in an absolute sense and I don't think the concept has been attained because this absolute realism is undefinable, is a fact which can be defined only *a posteriori*. However in my films there are some technical elements, even some exterior stylistic elements which cause my works to be, even if not totally realistic in the full, integral sense of the word, no longer neorealistic, either. As a matter of fact certain elements present in *Accattone* and *Mamma Roma*, such as the lack of immediate anecdotal suggestions of reality; the way in which I shoot my films, with which I conceive the frame; the sequences and the ensemble of the work—which is closed and not open, which is an epical whole and not one made up of anecdotes and lyrical suggestions of reality—all this makes *Accattone* and *Mamma Roma* no longer belong, even if rooted in it, to the neo-realistic sphere, to the neorealistic outlook.

As for the rest, I wouldn't know how to answer you; maybe I would have known how and with great precision one or two years ago. Right at this moment I wouldn't be able to tell

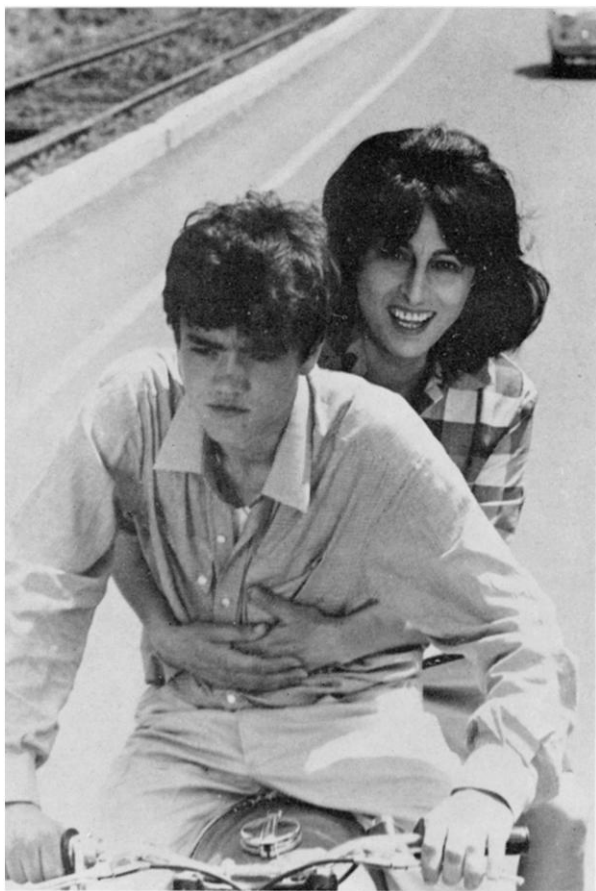
you what these works of mine really aimed at because in the last two years my whole ideological world has been under somewhat of a crisis, my ideas are not clear as they used to be two years ago. My works are what they are; now I could look at them with a detached critical eye but at this moment I could not presume to give a definition of what they meant to be in their quality of realistic works. Let's go back a little further in your questions and let's talk precisely about the first point, which I find the most interesting one. I mean what has been my relationship, as a writer who has been concerned with the lumpenproletariat in the main body of his work, with a new ideological-literary situation in the last few years, which you called European and defined as a product of the technological world, etc. In my opinion you have somewhat distorted my intentions when you compared the bourgeois character in a state of ideational, spiritual exhaustion to the subhuman character, to the subhumanity of my lumpenproletarian characters. This juxtaposition is only exterior because the two phenomena are opposed: in fact the lumpenproletarian is only in appearance contemporary to our history; the characteristics of the lumpenproletariat are prehistoric, are indeed pre-Christian; the moral world of a lumpenproletarian does not know Christianity. My characters for instance do not know what love is in the Christian sense; their morals are the typical morals of all the south of Italy and are based on honor. The philosophy of these characters, though in shreds, though reduced to minimal terms, is a pre-Christian philosophy of the Stoic Epicurean kind, which has survived the Roman world and has passed undamaged through Byzantine, Papal, and Bourbon dominations. The psychological world of the lumpenproletariat is practically prehistoric, whereas the bourgeois world is quite evidently the world of history. Now the bourgeoisie, not so much the Italian one but rather, probably, the American one or perhaps even that of some very advanced northern European countries, is approaching forms of privation of humanity due to the technology which is supplanting

humanism, but this has nothing to do with the subhumanity of *my* characters. I would like, however, to add one thing: the objection you posed would be right and it would have impressed me and perhaps thrown me into a crisis three or four months ago; now a painful thing has struck all of us which proves that actually very little has changed since the time I was writing *Ragazzi di vita* and *Una vita violenta*. When people talked about welfare, neocapitalistic optimism, the world which was by then moving inevitably toward a technological auto-definition, which was leaving humanism and Christianity behind and going toward a machine civilization, etc., the thing seemed already at hand, it seemed as if we already lived in that world. But instead the economic crisis that has struck our country shows that in reality these things may occur, are in fact already occurring, in other countries much more advanced than ours, maybe in America, but that in Italy we are still far from this world. Recently I took a tour through southern Italy to look for the places and characters I will need for the new film I am preparing, and I saw that all of southern Italy, which represents half of our country, is precisely what it was ten years ago; yes of course, in the villages of Apulia there is one more skyscraper, but this is essentially all that has changed in southern Italy. . . . Now obviously, when I was writing and talking about the lumpenproletariat I was wholly in that world, I couldn't cast glances towards what was outside of it since in that case I would have lost my coherence, my vigor, the integrity of that world, and I would have opened fissures in that particular style; I would have cracked its compactness. I wouldn't want, however, for someone to fall into the opposite excess, that is to consider the lumpenproletarian world as one that is completely finished. And this actually has happened in the last few years: as a matter of fact everybody, bourgeois critics and even communists themselves, had convinced themselves that the lumpenproletarian world did not exist any more. And what was I to do with these twenty million lumpenproletarians? Put them in a concentration camp and destroy

them in gas chambers? The attitude toward the lumpenproletariat was almost racist, as if they were people belonging to a world that did not exist any more; they were considered a closed book while, poor devils, they continued to exist. So it's all right to reconsider my excessive interest in this world, but evidently the opposite excess—to already see as realized a whole world which is still to come—must be corrected as well. The crisis of these last few months has somewhat reoriented Italians about the true situation of our country. Northern Italy, the Italy of Milan, Turin, etc., goes full speed toward a new era dominated by technology, toward a new prehistory, but the other half of Italy is still in the *true* prehistory. The world is being set up this way and in my future work I will make a precise attempt to take into account this reorientation of Italian reality.

Q.: (ANTONIETTA FIORITO, 2nd year acting): You have used nonprofessional actors in your films, save for Anna Magnani in *Mamma Roma*. I would like to know what has driven you to choose nonprofessional actors, what criteria you have used in selecting these actors, and what problems you had to face in directing them.

A.: If I must give my answer to you who are about to become professionals, I must do it with frankness. I have an idiosyncrasy concerning professional actors. I don't have, however, and this must be quite clear, a total bias against them; and this because I never want to submit my activity to rigid rules, to constraints. This never. (In fact I haven't only used Anna Magnani, but Orson Welles too.) As you can see it's not that I am so factious in my choice; actually I keep all the roads open. My idiosyncrasy depends on the fact that for what concerns my own pictures, a professional actor is another consciousness that is added to my own. If I have made the decision to make films, it's because I've wanted to make them exactly as I write poems, as I write novels. I had to be the author of my own films. I couldn't have been a co-author, or a director in the industry's sense of the word: the man who merely transfers a script to film. I had to be, at every mo-



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ment, the author of my own work. Now a professional actor carries a consciousness with him, an idea of his own about the character he interprets. Hence, even granting that I could have won the struggle which naturally would have developed between me and the professional actor, a certain something of his consciousness—which is a spurious element in the face of the stylistic integrity of the whole work of art—would have been left anyway. That's the reason for my resistance to professional actors. At one point I thought that the Anna Magnani of *Open City* could have filtered completely into my own reality, but this did not happen because in fact Anna Magnani kept her own consciousness and her own independence as an actress, and rightly so. It was a mistake on my part to believe that I could have taken her

totally in my hands and destroyed her. It was absurd and inhuman on my part to think such a thing; and indeed *Mamma Roma* shows this limitation. Let's agree on one point: I consider Anna Magnani a great actress and if I were to do *Mamma Roma* again, I would probably go back to her. Clearly, however, in *Mamma Roma* there is an exterior stylistic element which does not belong to my own world, something spurious with respect to my own style. With Orson Welles the problem was somewhat different. He responded to the character much better since in *Ricotta* I had him play himself: he was playing the director, was playing himself; maybe he was caricaturing himself and therefore this fit perfectly well with my own world. I repeat, however, that I do not want to have fixed rules—norms that would limit me, even if I have an almost ideological aesthetic preference for nonprofessional actors who themselves are shreds of reality as is a landscape, a sky, the sun, a donkey passing along the road. They're all elements which I manipulate and turn into whatever I want. Of course, I do not exclude the possibility that in my future films I may use professional actors.

Then there is a less characteristic reason, but one I find very important just the same, and that is a linguistic reason. You know that in Italy there is no average language. There is no Italian language as there is in French, as there is in English. A porter of the Gare de Lyon speaks almost like a great French man of letters since, substantially, he makes instrumental use of the same language. There is no such language in Italy and therefore each author must rely on particular languages. Moravia himself, who gives the impression of being a writer using a very instrumental language (actually Moravia had managed to make of the Italian language a kind of calculus of the rationalism of the French language)—look at *The Woman of Rome*, look at *The Empty Canvas*—has had to take a step backward, linguistically, and draw on an average spoken language which is nevertheless peculiar to the Roman bourgeoisie, or to the Roman working class, with his *Roman Tales*, for example. Each of us in

other words must rely on a special language (I have used the Roman dialect and jargon) unless we want to use the purely literary language. All this is true for many historical reasons which it is useless for me to illustrate to you—Italy is less than a century old, whereas France has had five centuries of unified bureaucratic and political life. Now this problem of the language is very important when we come to choose an actor. What language do *you* learn? For you, as movie actors, this is not such a pressing problem, but for a stage actor it is a much bigger one. But even in you, in professional film actors, there is this vacuum, this gap; you learn a language which does not exist. In other words they teach you to stress accents, to say a word in a given manner, to rely on a given diction, on a given syntax that in effect do not exist. Hence it is all fictitious, because obviously an actor does not speak like a literary man, does not speak like a thief, does not speak like a Lucanian farmer, does not speak like a great industrial magnate of the north. How is he going to speak then? He ought to speak an average language, like the one spoken by English and French actors. But you, what language do *you* speak? Tell me. Now the fact that you and professional actors in general build your acting upon a language which does not exist is a frightful thing to me, because I can't have someone speak a language which doesn't exist.

Q.: (DAN PERRY, 2nd year directing): In *Accattone* you have used music by Bach. The film has not gained anything from it and the music has definitely lost some majesty. I would like to know why you did it, since I believe that you did not mean to use Bach as a counterpoint to your image, a practice which is too obvious and has already been widely exploited in the cinema. In order to clarify my thoughts better I choose another example from Italian films, *Il Posto* by Olmi. Well, I cannot imagine this film with baroque music such as you used in *Accattone*.

Q.: (GIULIO CESARE CASTELLO): I believe Perry has said some true things that coincide with what I think myself. The question has

different aspects however, one of which is implied in the adjective Perry just used, that is "baroque." But apart from the suitability of choosing pre-existent music of such value and to use it to comment on a film, on many occasions, commenting figuratively on your films, you've made reference to Masaccio, especially for *Accattone*, while for *Ricotta* you made reference for certain aspects to posters, etc. It seems evident to me that the choice of music in the class of Bach or Vivaldi already represents a contradiction with the choice of the sources of visual inspiration, since those inspirations and that music belong to two different aesthetics, quite distinct and separate. The other aspect of the problem is the central one: what sense is there in the adoption of this kind of music for films, which is becoming somewhat of an affectation. . . . This is the only facet of your work as a director which does not convince me. I admire your films very much, the only thing that bothers me is the music, with the exception of *La Ricotta*, for the main part, which is more of a composite—intellectually more ambitious with certain aspects in an ironic key. (In this particular case the use of music corresponds to certain visual references in the color sections and consequently has its own reason for being; a reason which I cannot find in the other films.) It seems to me that to use Bach to comment on the images of a movie is a bit in the *parvenu* style—I use this word in a sense that I beg you not to consider offensive—because it's obvious that a work with the accomplishment of a musical page by Bach could never fail, speaking directly to the sensibility and not to the intellect, to impress a certain effect on the audience; but this would be an effect of a hypnotic or distracting kind inasmuch as it creates one aesthetic contemplation within another and is therefore self-destructive. In a film, music cannot help having an instrumental value in the sense that it must serve to express a given outlook which is the film's itself. Now I feel that in Italy there are some good musicians who know how to write excellent original music for films, and there are also musicians who, even though highly respectable

composers, are practitioners of the “pastiche.” Nino Rota—and this is testified to by the music he has written both for Fellini and Visconti, to quote only two—is the ideal composer for films precisely because he knows how to be a composer “in the manner of,” he knows how to adapt himself, in other words he knows how to put himself at the service of an artist and of a work. Let’s take the soundtrack of *La Dolce Vita* or *8½* or *Il Gattopardo*: it’s extraordinary to observe what Rota has done, how he has been able to bring together in the soundtrack of *8½* certain musical elements that we might call enticing and how in *Gattopardo* he has been able to write music in the manner of Bruckner (and this is no coincidence because Visconti used Bruckner himself in *Senso*) or write dance music, waltzes, polkas, mazurkas, which smoothly complement an authentic nineteenth-century waltz, by Verdi to boot. Rota’s mimetism, the highest kind of mimetism, attains the level of total fusion. Now I believe this is the ideal type of cinematographic composer, the most suitable for composing film music. Conversely I am persuaded that the employment of pre-existent music, particularly if famous, and even more so if top level, cannot give results of full fusion with the film, but rather creates perplexity in the audience, which begins to wonder about the reasons that have driven the director towards that choice.

A.: To begin with, I will clarify something with complete sincerity. While I know something about painting, about music (though I love it much more) I know much less. And thus probably—let’s continue sincerely—my use of Bach in *Accattone* has been slightly mystifying. I’ve taken Bach not for its specific historical significance, but rather as Music with a capital “M” insofar as for me, musically ignorant as I am, Bach truly is music in the absolute sense, able to give forth that sense of religiousness and that epic quality that I was talking about before. Now I took the liberty of doing this because I consider music a very exterior element in the film, a bit like a frame, an element that is in other words almost *popular*—with the exception of rare instances of pure

functionality — and I have therefore taken a wide liberty of choice. Possibly I made a mistake; however I couldn’t have realized certain given effects in any other way because *my* vocation for the “pastiche” in cinema naturally runs against much coarser and more basic elements than in literature. The literary “pastiche” can draw on an endless number of subtleties, the film “pastiche” much less so; cinematographic means are much heavier, coarser, more massive than the stylistic elements of a novel or of a poem and it’s therefore possible that the results will have a certain grossness, as for instance in the scene where you hear Bach when Accattone rushes to fight his brother-in-law; however I repeat, since I consider music as a merely psychological element of the film, it seems to me that the Bach has attained functionality within the limits generally pertaining to music in a film. And I find this very justifiable, much more than the composition of a musical “pastiche,” because I don’t understand why one should put a false Bach in the place of a true one. Obviously when I choose music for a film I unfortunately have to take it for granted that the connoisseurs of music will recognize the piece, who plays it, the recording company, and will wonder about my choice, since they won’t find it justified. However the number of people who would feel this way would be quite small and hopefully, after the first moment, even they could overcome this feeling. But the enormous mass of spectators, including myself, who know little about music, would probably not receive this impression and the music chosen would be functional for them. . . .

Q.: (CASTELLO): To what extent do the films you wrote for others represent a phase of your artistic development, cinematographic in particular, and to what extent, instead, did those films—once they were finished—turn out to be against your own concept of cinema? To what extent has your work been manipulated, if not in the writing stage, then in the stage of realization? I would like to say that in some of these films, and particularly in *La Notte Brava* (which I don’t like, while I like *Morte di un Amico* very much) there is a dominant ele-

ment of decadence—I would say—in the derogatory sense of the term. Now, in my judgment, “decadentism” in its positive meaning is a fundamental component of your artistic personality; I would like to know therefore if you feel that *La Notte Brava* is a stopping-point, an obligatory passage through which you got rid of certain debris and through which you brought a certain type of representation to greater fullness, to greater economy of means, away from that decadentist complacency, and so forth.

A.: Oh, here the answer seems pretty simple to me: I made *Accattone* out of the desire to realize what I had meant to express in my scenarios. And then, unlike you, I consider *Morte di un Amico* (that is, from my point of view as scriptwriter) a basically much greater betrayal than *La Notte Brava*. Because what prevails in *La Notte Brava* is perhaps what is peculiarly Bolognini's, that is to say an ornamental and superficial decadentism whose main points were particularly evident in *Bell'Antonio*, and which in *La Notte Brava* never exceeds a level of pure ornamentation, pure divertissement. And I believe this is the decadentism you referred to when you spoke of *La Notte Brava*: a kind of curlicue, of more or less vital ornament. The limitations of *Morte di un Amico* are not due so much to the director Rossi but to the producer who imposed upon Rossi a certain *modus operandi*, revising the scenario page by page and requiring Rossi to sign it. We find in it the unbearable fault of sentimentalism. And so although perhaps Rossi has worked with more inspiration at representing this world of exploiters of women, of prostitutes, at times with more integrity, with more physical poetry, I in truth reject the film as a whole and this is why I didn't want to sign the script; I was deeply insulted by the interference of the producer which, in my opinion, is immediately apparent in the sentimentality and continual euphemism which dominate Rossi's film. Whereas Bolognini followed my scenario rather faithfully, burdening it not with sentimentality, but simply with ornamentation. But it was precisely the disappointment I received from these

films that gave me the push I needed to make a film myself. . . .

Q.: (ELENA LUMBRERAS, 2nd year directing): It seems to me that you don't like your characters, but rather that you contemplate them with an intellectual's detachment; you don't love them as does, for instance, Jean Genêt, because he is one of them, and even if you as a writer have many points in common with Genêt, it seems to me that you don't want to redeem your characters, but rather leave them as they are. And this I find somewhat dishonest on your part; it is a literary attitude not to seek some road to salvation for these people who suffer.

A.: Maybe what you say is true. Many times a poet, a writer, is cruel, is pitiless; it's not true that love always has humanistic, brotherly, or sweet aspects, many times love has extremely cruel aspects. Now, that I love or do not love my characters can only come through from the way I expressed them and not from what I said about them in terms of content. If I have managed to give what I meant to give in *Accattone* (and let's speak therefore of the epic religious grandeur of these miserable characters); if I have managed to project this through the stylistic design of my film, through the rhythm of the story, through the way I move my characters, the atmosphere in which I immerse them, through the light, the sun, the environment around them, if I have managed to put forth this idea about them, this means I love them. If instead I failed in this, then it means that mine is a facile, insincere love: on the other hand I don't think that you should look for love in falsely ambitious attitudes as, for instance, the effort to have the characters redeemed. What I want to say is that redemption must be contained in the style itself. If stylistically I have failed, in other words if I haven't achieved a result in terms of style this means that my love is insincere, that I will try to love more.

Q.: (SIMON RAOUL HARTOG, 1st year directing): Your films show, in my judgment, a lack of interest, perhaps of intensity, in the visual part of the film. This is due to a stylistic or perhaps literary reason.

A.: Look, my opinion is totally opposite to yours, therefore I really cannot answer you because to me *Accattone* is frightfully visual. I throw clots of visual reality of such violence against the audience that—it seems to me it's rather rare, and I don't understand where you see this lack of visual quality. I don't know: think for a moment of the scene of those people eating in the boat on the Tiber, think of *Accattone* naked, crossing himself, of *Accattone* diving, think, I don't know, just of the walls of Pigneto peeling in the sun; I find this of a strikingly severe visualness because visual severity and austerity are indeed the dominating rule in my films. I try, in other words, to avoid all that is ornamental, all that is "trop plein," too lively; in a certain sense I am the opposite, I would like to be the opposite of what Fellini is, who is instead extremely visual just in the sense you mean, perhaps; he is full of things, while I try to reduce my own exiguity to one object only because my inspiration, as Castello has mentioned, is above all else painting and, specifically, the painting of Masaccio, an exceedingly visual painter in that the matter he presents us has a chiaroscuro violence of shocking plasticity, while other painters more visual in the sense you mean, are more ornamental and hence flatter, they remain more attached to the wall or to the canvas or they don't come out at all.

Q.: (HARTOG): What you say is probably at the root of your attitude toward *La Commare Secca*, which I would like to find out about.

A.: As I've already playfully claimed, I believe that while my aesthetic idea is one of a frontal, massive, romantic, chiaroscuro-like world, a statuary, well-rounded world; Bertolucci's idea is more elegant, modern, that is to say impressionistic, since the painters who are at the roots of Bertolucci's visual inspiration are the French impressionists and the French cinema as well. All the same I like *La Commare Secca*, there are very beautiful moments in it . . .

Q.: (STEFANO SILVESTRINI, 1st year directing): In the last issue of *Europa Letteraria* they

published some of your poems which make a clear reference to Dreyer. You speak of Dreyer at length and I would like, therefore, to ask you who are the directors who most influenced your style.

A.: There are three of them: Dreyer, Chaplin and Mizoguchi. If you analyze *Accattone* you'll see that Dreyer's *Passion de Jeanne d'Arc* has influenced me by giving me the sense of the close-up, the sense of figurative severity, visual severity as we were saying. It's a picture I saw when I was your age, and which I've always loved: it's been one of my cinematographic and visual models.

Q.: (FRANCONE): I would like you to clarify your point of view on the question of contamination. I'll try to be a bit more explicit: in the society we live in we have this sociological contamination between the bourgeois world and the prehistoric world you described, which live together without touching. Starting from this assumption in your films you give us the image of human and subhuman creatures, often vulgar, yet speaking a highly refined language. And it is for this reason that I find it very proper and very suitable that as a musical background you used the most refined music that has ever been written. In short, I ask you whether musical quotations and the obvious pictorial references of some of your film work are intended to be indications of this contamination that occurs all the time in the world today.

A.: The sign under which I work is always contamination. In fact if you read a page of my books you'll notice that contamination is the dominant stylistic factor, because I, who come from a bourgeois world—and not only bourgeois but, at least when I was very young, the most refined sections of that world—I, reader of the most refined decadent writers, etc., have attained this world of mine. Consequently, the "pastiche" had necessarily to be born. And in fact in any page of my novels the levels I'm working on are at least three: specifically, the direct speech of the characters who talk in dialect, in slang, in the most vulgar slang, the most physical I would say; then the free indirect

speech, that is the interior monologue of my characters, and finally the narrative level which is my own. Now these three linguistic layers cannot live each in its own sphere without meeting; they must continually intersect and become tangled with one another. So much so that in the lines spoken by the characters, even those that sound most physically and brutally recorded, my bourgeois education works its way into the speech to the point of transforming into endecasyllables lines that are physically recorded from the real world. In the free indirect speech, then, it is clear that there is contamination. Such contamination occurs at the higher level too, specifically at the descriptive and narrative level. Some particular descriptions, that Cecchi liked and that have been in fact the only ones he did not attack, are written at certain particular moments by a man of letters who—I tremble in confessing it—is almost post-D'Annunzian; yet even in them you'll always find elements drawn from the other linguistic layers; this happens in my films, too. Evidently when I deal with a given material I represent it in its real physical brutality; this means that I go to Pigneto and I photograph those walls, that rubbish, that sun, and I take Franco Citti and I photograph him as he is; obviously, however, all this gross, ruvid, physically violent material is then lifted by me to a different linguistic level. On the page of a novel this extremely complex and refined contamination might be missed, but in the film, whose language is more elementary, grosser than the literary one—perhaps Castello does not agree with me—all this emerges with greater violence. Consequently while the D'Annunzian elements which possibly exist in a novel can disappear (only a diagnostician, a critic can trace them) the elements of sublime religiosity that I attempted to translate with the music of Bach are immediately apprehensible and can therefore more easily arouse disapproval. . . .

Q.: (CARLO MORANDI, 2nd year directing): I don't see why Pasolini shouldn't have used Bach, in fact I find it stylistically very proper that he has used Bach since he hasn't employed professional actors, and in the same way he

could not use a composer like Rota, because both composer and professional actors would have interposed their own consciousness between Pasolini and the world, thereby limiting his freedom of expression. When Pasolini photographs Franco Citti, he abstracts an element from reality, just like that, a block from a reality just as a piece of music by Bach is a block from another reality. Pasolini uses these two elements and makes a kind of collage out of them in which he is the poet and actually offers us his intuitions. . . .

Q.: (FIORAVANTI): I would like to ask Pasolini to say a few words on the film he is preparing now and on his future projects. I mean advance information not so much on the subject, which as we all know by now is the Gospel according to St. Matthew, but rather on the origin of this choice which would certainly complete for us the picture of Pasolini's personality that has already been outlined very clearly through the conversation as it has developed so far.

A.: I was saying earlier that I feel it's unsafe to speak about what I'm about to do; it's unsafe in the sense that talking about it unwinds the desire to do it. It has already happened with a book: I talked so much about it beforehand that I felt all my interior charge evaporated and I believe I'll never write it now. Well then, my next film will be *The Gospel according to St. Matthew*. . . . The St. Matthew I have in mind is somehow the exaltation, on another level, of the elements present in *Accattone*, in *Mamma Roma* and in *Ricotta*. I conceived of the film in a totally unexpected, sudden, irrational way. I read the Gospel, and as I was reading it, that increase of vitality one feels when one reads as great a work as the Gospel, suggested the idea of making a film out of it. Thinking it over I understood that there were profound reasons, that is the liberation of religious inspiration, in a Marxist, from the spurious element that had inspired *Accattone*, in other words the liberation from the despair which was in *Accattone* and which becomes inspiration as such. According to me, St. Matthew ought to relate violently to the bourgeoisie

rushing headlong towards a future which is the destruction of man, of the anthropologically human, classical and religious elements of man. This film is the mere visualization of a particular Gospel, that of St. Matthew; it is not a life of Christ, I haven't put the Gospels together and written a scenario of the life of Christ as has been done other times; no, this is precisely the Gospel according to Saint Matthew, represented as it is; I haven't added one line and I haven't taken any out; I follow the order of the story as it is in St. Matthew, with some narrative cuts of such violence and such epic force that they are almost magic but which are still part of the Gospel itself, and therefore this film will be a rather strange thing from the stylistic point of view. In fact long sections of soundless film—the characters don't talk for long stretches but must represent what they say through gestures and expressions alone, as they did in the silent movies—are followed by sections where Christ speaks for twenty minutes at a stretch. It will be a film that will be, unintentionally, very close to that magmatic style which is basically always typical of my stories. That is to say that stylistically I go back to magma, I free myself from closed forms, from elements of regular scenario writing, etc., with this inspiration of a religious and ideological kind which I hope will give unity and compactness to my work.

Q.: (CASTELLO): As a final point I would like to go back to an old topic and ask you to develop it today, but only so as to give us some extra data. You have written some interesting things, of a partially obscure tone, controvertible, on film criticism and its actual or presumed lack of philological means to judge a film. I would like to ask you to clarify very briefly what you mean with this, as a partial commitment toward fuller discussion at some other time.

A.: Naturally some rare exceptions do exist; let me state this first. In my opinion film criticism lacks philological rigor due to the tools it's forced to use and the media through which it speaks. While literary criticism may rely on media which are similar to film criticism's

(newspapers, weekly magazines, etc.—where it's done very badly, perhaps worse than film criticism itself) it has, nevertheless, other outlets such as specialized journals and universities where, side by side with boring, conformist, and academic professors, there are others who are very advanced, in the front line of culture; though it is possible at a university, if you so wish, to express yourself thoroughly with the most sophisticated, complete means that philology provides, no such instrument is available to film criticism. Essentially there are perhaps one or two specialized magazines in all. Universities don't include it in their curriculum, and consequently film criticism in general, and journalistic film criticism in particular, cannot have any serious cultural rigor; it may perhaps give more or less approximate judgments, it may produce a nice elegant piece, but of course since it is addressed to large masses of readers it can never deepen its critical investigation and make use of specialized and specific means of study. This in my opinion is the limitation of film criticism.

Q.: (CASTELLO): I think we may say that, particularly where cinema is concerned, the term philology may easily be misinterpreted, may be used with different meanings and that in some film criticism there is even an excessive use of philology.

A.: When I say philology I mean above all the philology typical of stylistic criticism, that is comparative philological criticism. And there is probably something similar to this in the cinema too. There certainly exist histories of histories of the cinema where these philological processes, these comparisons, this tracing of the source and so on and so forth, are quite evident. In spite of this, in my opinion there exists no film criticism that possesses a precise diction with a stylistic critical set of rules as there is in literature. And this is also due to practical reasons because a film is not a text that I can pick up and examine and do all the laboratory tests I want on as with a written page: if I want to see it, I must at least use a moviola. To examine it in any depth I should look at all the stages and retakes of it; we



THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO ST. MATTHEW

know very well that studying retakes plays a very important part in the philological and critical examination of an author. How can we see this in a film? These are some objective elements which prevent the very birth of philological criticism; nevertheless these elements, if one so wanted, could be eliminated.

Q.: (FIORAVANTI): I'm afraid we must terminate this very interesting discussion. There are many other subjects we could examine with Pasolini, for instance television—I know that Pasolini has ideas in this connection that would stimulate a rewarding debate—but I do not think we can deprive him of any more time and impose further upon his patience. Therefore I thank you again for this meeting, Mr. Pasolini, for the very interesting things you've told us, in the hope that we will be able to have you with us again soon, perhaps to discuss your film on the Gospel according to St. Matthew.

A.: Thank you, thank you all.

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